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## THE SUPREME FACE OF THE CHRISTIAN CENTURIES.

By JOHN POWELL LENOX,  
Chicago, Ill.



FRESCO FROM CATACOMBS OF  
SS. ACHILLI E NEREO, ROME

See p. 384

SCHOLARS have said that the infinite chaos of lost things in literature contains no greater treasure than the forgotten writings of the great Greek tragedians, and one writer has added: "More valuable surely would be some authoritative record that would fill the many vacant spaces in the accounts we possess of Him who was perfectly human as well as supremely divine." So, too, the heart has clamored for some objective representation, some pictured semblance, of Him whom it enshrines as its highest and holiest ideal, the Man of all men who "was

made flesh and dwelt among us." That venerable authority, St. John of Damascus, argued that, as the Lord took upon him the form of a man and chose to be observed as such by others, he did not forbid representation of himself and the scenes of his life. "Paint all these things," he said, "in colors as well as in books."

As there are four records of our Lord's life and words in literature, so in art he is depicted by four gospels of representation—fresco, mosaic, painting, and sculpture. They, too, show that the Prince of the chosen people is become the Desire of all Nations.

If there could be gathered in one volume a representative collection of the pictured Christ, one striking and interesting fact would be made prominent, namely, the stamp of individual nationality upon the work of the artists.

Besides this diversity of representation, another impressive



“JESUS, DER KINDERFREUND”

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*From painting by F. Kirchbach*

fact would be a surprising unity of resemblance, making the identity of the Christ face a comparatively easy matter despite its varying garb of nationality and setting.

The ages of art as well as the ages of men have caught up Pilate's peroration, investing it with a depth of meaning he never



FRESCO FROM CATACOMB OF S. CALLISTO, ROME  
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dreamed of, proclaiming everywhere, "Behold the Man!" Thus, as has been beautifully said, "One face appears in all the centuries of Christian history and in the art of every European nation as the picture of the world's Beloved, who unites in one all the nations of the earth and links humanity to heaven by the splendor of his everlasting name." Whence came the contour of this countenance? What gave to it such a marked individuality? Was it due to the dream of a painter supremely favored above his fellows, or the exalted vision of a sculptor who had seen with more than mortal eyes? Let us examine without prejudice, if possible, the testimony which is supplied by the record of art.

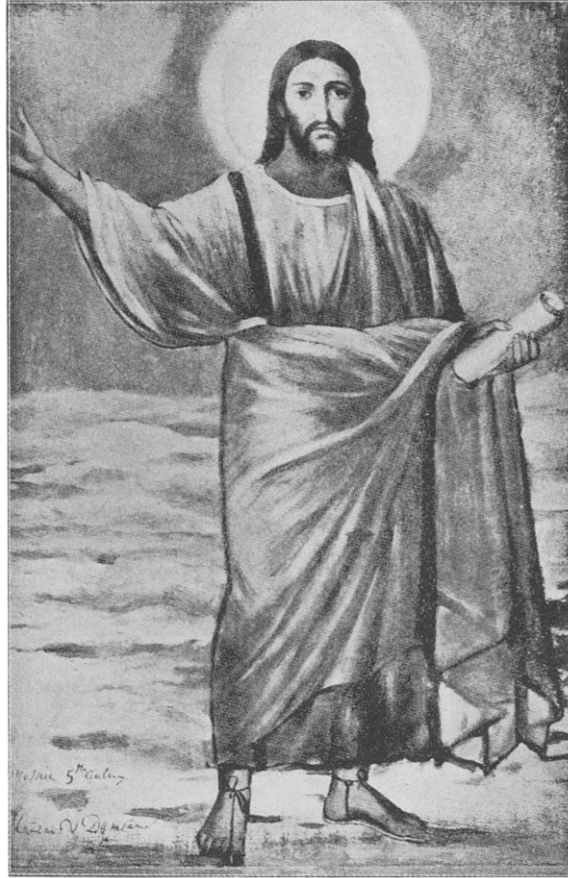
As Rome has preserved to history in lasting marble and

bronze the portraits of her rulers and statesmen, so within the catacombs of the Eternal City, the writer believes, were hidden for centuries the earliest portrayals of the face of Christ which have established what is known as his "likeness" in the world.

Sir Wyke Bayliss, president of the Royal Society of British Artists, than whom there is no higher authority upon the subject, thus defines what is meant by the term: "By the 'likeness of Christ' I do not mean the 'likenesses' nor any one of them in particular, but the verisimilitude common to them all, which was not invented by any one of the great masters, but was adopted by them from earlier records. The likeness that painters and sculptors in all ages have had before their mental vision when they attempted to portray His image; the likeness that is known throughout the world, sometimes more perfectly, sometimes less perfectly rendered, to which we all unconsciously appeal when we think of our Lord in any act of his ministry; the likeness that enables us to recognize in any group of figures the face that is intended to represent the face of Christ. . . . It is common to every form of art and to every country in the world. Art is the one universal language that has never been confounded, and on this subject it speaks the same word to every people. Even the evangelists who carry Christianity to savage tribes have no need to translate the likeness of Christ as they have to translate his words. It is at all events today a fixed type. No painter would dream of altering it, nor of claiming it as an invention of his own." The catacombs have been called the Diploma Gallery of the early Christian painters, and served as hiding places for the Roman Christians at a time when the art of portraiture was a marked characteristic of the age. Sir Edward Poynter and Mr. Percy Head in their *Text-Book on Classic and Italian Painting* state that "From the time of Augustus to the time of Diocletian was the period during which Roman art, such as it was, chiefly flourished. Portrait painting engrossed the energies of the most capable artists, and pictures or statues of eminent men were multiplied in public places and private collections." The earliest frescoes of the catacombs date back to the apostolic age and the century fol-

lowing, and were undoubtedly the work of Roman artists who bore the name of Christians.

Paul found in Rome waiting to give him hearty welcome a Christian church which he strengthened and enlarged by two



MOSAIC FROM BASILICA OF SS. COSMA E DAMIANO, ROME  
See p. 386

years of preaching and teaching. Many of its members he calls affectionately by name, and among the brethren were men of position and means. It seems inconceivable that none of these should have any knowledge of the personality of Christ, either from eyewitnesses or from others to whom those who had seen

the living Lord had given description of his appearance. Again, it is unlikely that they would allow representations of him to be perpetuated which were manifestly untrue.

The most beautiful, as well as one of the earliest, of the catacomb frescoes of Christ is the famous Callistine medallion portrait from a chapel in the cemetery of S. Callisto, Rome.<sup>1</sup> It should be borne in mind that this catacomb was closed by Pope Damasus about 365. The fresco is assigned to the second century, and its antiquity is evidenced by the entire absence of symbolic imagery and its association with other works in the same chamber that are among the oldest in the catacombs.

The portrait is life-size and was originally executed in color, but rock damp and the smoke from candles of visitors have so obscured and marred the work that little more than a shadowy outline now remains of the nobly beautiful face. It has suffered much also by misrepresentation through common and carelessly executed wood cuts that bear scarcely any resemblance to the original. The reproduction used here is from a facsimile carefully made from the original fifty years ago, before smoke and damp had all but effaced the fresco, by Mr. Thomas Heaphy, himself a portrait painter, an expert copyist of works of this character, and an ardent and devout student of the subject. The long hair parted in the middle and falling upon the shoulders, the divided beard, straight nose, and wide, intellectual forehead, full, solemn eyes, and sensitive mouth combine to make a cast of countenance elevated and spiritual in expression.

Three other frescoes noteworthy in this connection are two representations of Christ from the catacombs of SS. Achilli e Nereo, and a third from a picture of the Last Supper now in the Vatican library, all bearing a common resemblance. The reproduction of one of the faces from the catacombs of SS. Achilli e Nereo<sup>2</sup> impresses the beholder, not as an imaginary picture, but as the work of an artist who was striving for the portrait of a person who had been described to him and of whose face he had seen other copies. For some reason it was left unfinished by the artist. These four faces are master links in

<sup>1</sup> See p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 380.

that golden chain which is the glory of Christian art. They belong to the group which might be called the keynote of that unique and impressive symphony of delineation having for its theme the portrayal of the Christ countenance. So distinctive



CHRIST AS A PILGRIM

See p. 388

*From fresco by Fra Angelico*

and universal has been their influence that in this prolific age of pictorial reproduction the child of the intelligent Christian household rarely fails to recognize the face of Christ, however varied its environment or expression. After the dark and perilous night of persecution under the reign of the cruel Diocletian there dawned for the church early in the fourth century, when Constantine came into power, a new era of deliverance and freedom. Stately basilicas and churches richly adorned took the place of underground caverns and chambers, and upon their domes and walls was emblazoned in still enduring mosaic the same face of the Redeemer which had looked down upon the resting places of their martyred dead. It was the same face, also, that had been brought in mosaic and enamel from Byzantium,



the face engraved on medallions of glass with portraits of the apostles, and sometimes outlined upon the linen face cloths of the dead. As the design in mosaic composition is purely mechanical, the work of a copyist who followed it by rote, the



DETAIL OF "CHRIST IN BENEDICTION"

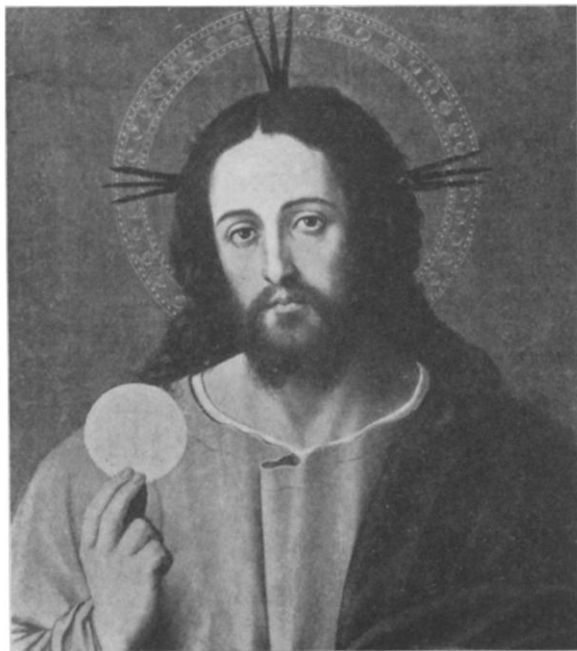
See p. 389

*From painting by Cima*

representations of Christ now became stereotyped, in most instances showing little or no attempt at any expression of thought or feeling. The earliest of these mosaics dating from the fourth century are in the Baptistry of Constantine and the Basilica of "St. Paul without the Wall." A notable example of a sixth-century mosaic, also in Rome, is a majestic full-length figure of Christ in the Church of SS. Cosma e Damiano in the Forum.<sup>3</sup> The figures of the composition, which occupies the dome, are twelve feet in height, and the subject represented is

<sup>3</sup>See p. 383.

from the second chapter of Revelation: "These things saith the Son of God who hath his eyes like to a flame of fire and his feet like fine brass. . . . He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the



DETAIL OF "LAST SUPPER"

See p. 391

*From painting by Juanes*

nations, . . . and I will give him the morning star." From the deep blue sky Christ descends with the "scroll of truth" in his left hand, and addresses the saints and apostles grouped below him. He is clothed in a garment of gold, representing the "flame of fire," which is most effective against the transparent ultramarine of the background.

Although in the centuries following there were frequent forms of a debased type, these mosaics of the basilicas preserved the likeness through the long period of the dark ages to the early days of the Renaissance.

Then came a change. To the "passionless simplicity of

portraiture" expression, feeling, and significant action were added. Under the hands of the early Italian artists Cimabue, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Christ began to be pictured, not as a glorified Redeemer coming in the clouds of heaven, but in the events of



DETAIL OF "CHRIST AND THE WORD OF LIFE"

See p. 391

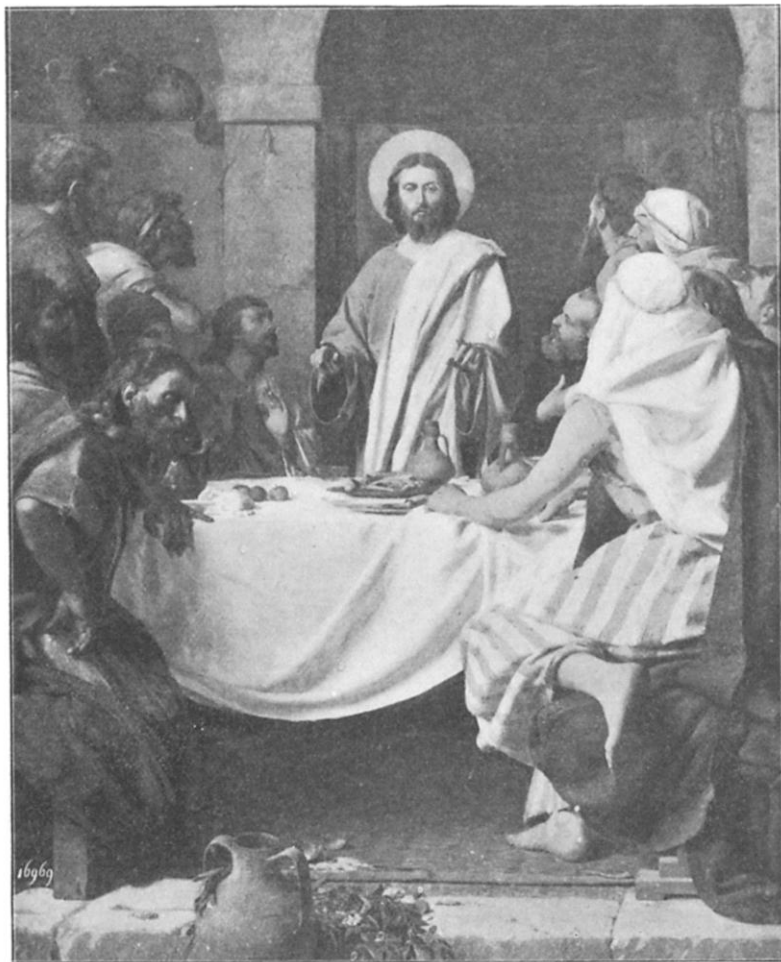
*From painting by Vladimir Makovsky*

his daily life upon earth. In the mind of the painters, reverence and imagination united to illuminate the theme, if not with the finish and more perfect execution of later periods, at least with a sincerity of purpose that cannot be doubted. A favorite old fresco, the colors of which are still surprisingly preserved, is that which the sweet-souled and devout Angelico painted over a doorway leading into the hospice where strangers were entertained in the Monastery of San Marco at Florence. The "Walk to Emmaus" it is commonly called, but is more correctly "Two Dominican Brothers Receiving the Lord as a Pilgrim."<sup>4</sup> The picture will serve as an illustration of the early Italian type of Christ.

One of the gems of that model gallery of art, the Dresden,

<sup>4</sup> See p. 385.

is "Christ in Benediction,"<sup>5</sup> a majestic full-length figure of the Savior for a long while wrongfully attributed to Gian Bellini,



THE LAST SUPPER

See p. 390

By Giacomo Martinetti

but now known to be the work of Cima, who was a follower, not a pupil, of Bellini. He shows in this brilliantly finished work a mingling of the severity of the Paduan with the

<sup>5</sup>See p. 386.

softness and lustrous coloring of the Venetian school. The figure of Christ, with its sharp features, abundant dark hair and beard, may be cited as an example of the mediæval Italian type.

Showing the modern Italian type we have Giacomo Marti-



See p. 392

SUPPER AT EMMAUS

*From painting by Rembrandt*

netti's painting of the "Last Supper" in the Church of the Savior at Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Christ has risen from his seat, and, with sorrowful, downcast glance that gives no hint of him whose heart is false, utters the fateful words: "And one of you shall betray me." Some of the disciples have started to their feet in excitement and press close to their Lord, while all faces, except one, in anxious inquiry seek His. So deep is their concern that not one of them notices the unhappy Judas who sits in the foreground. The face of Christ is serious, dignified, and contemplative. The picture is well balanced, and the close grouping of the intelligent-looking disciples admirably managed.

<sup>6</sup> See p. 389.

In the Prado Palace at Madrid hangs a representation of the Savior by Juanes—a gentle, earnest man, we are told, who, like many other Spanish artists, dedicated his life to the service of the church. The illustration is a detail from one of his cele-



“CHRIST AND MARY THE SINNER”

See p. 393

*From painting by Edelfelt*

brated “Last Suppers,” showing a tender spiritual conception of the face of Christ thoroughly Spanish in type.<sup>7</sup>

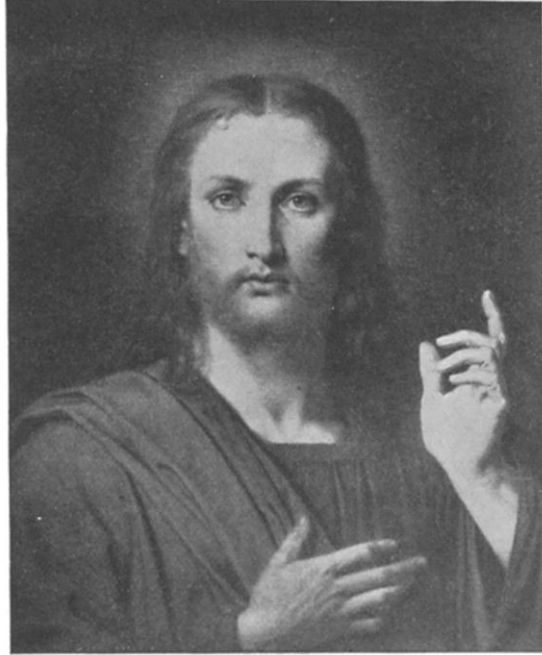
The history of Russia is shadowed by much sorrow and suffering; naturally it is more or less reflected in her art. From the brush of Vladimir Makovsky is the picture “Christ and the Word of Life.”<sup>8</sup> The text, painted in old Russian upon the open pages of the Bible, is: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to

<sup>7</sup> See p. 387.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 388.

prepare a place for you." The original is a panel picture in the Cathedral of Kazan, St. Petersburg.

In Rembrandt's "Supper at Emmaus"<sup>9</sup> Christian art treasures a small but impressive picture, now in the Louvre, affording an



"OUR SAVIOR"

By kind permission of D. H. McAlpin, Esq.

*From painting by Hugues Merle*

example of the Dutch type. The charm of the work lies in its simplicity and naturalness. Mrs. Jameson says of it: "Rembrandt took the subject of the 'Supper at Emmaus' and baptized it in the pure waters of the gospel. We have before us a countenance pale and tender, meek and lowly of heart, adorned only with holiness and glorified life; with eyes of unfathomable pathos needing no theatrical upcasting, for they see God everywhere."

One of the Champs de Mars pictures of several years ago is shown in "Christ and Mary the Sinner," by Edelfelt. The

<sup>9</sup> See p. 390.

white-clad figure, severe in its plainness, carrying an alpenstock, so useful in that rocky country, a glimpse of which we catch in the thinly wooded shore, is a Finnish Christ.<sup>10</sup> We have the same national lineaments repeated in the features of the kneel-



DETAIL OF "CHRIST THE CONSOLER"

*From painting by Carl Bloch*

ing woman, half shrinking lest she may hear again the hated old taunt and cruel reproach, but surprised in her sorrow by the gracious words of love and helpfulness that fall from the lips of her forgiving Lord.

A work that has impressed many as an inspiration of the highest order, standing out alone in its noble individuality, is a half figure of Christ by the late Hugues Merle, a French artist. He was a pupil of Coignet, and was noted for the excellency of the eyes he put into his portraits, giving to them a depth and brilliancy that were remarkably life-like.

Carl Bloch, in his noted painting "Christus Consolator," has given a noble conception of the subject in a Scandinavian

<sup>10</sup> See p. 391.



setting. The illustration is a detail from the original. It is a remarkable countenance, which expresses in no small degree those exalted qualities which give it a large measure of consonance with the words of that incomparable invitation painted



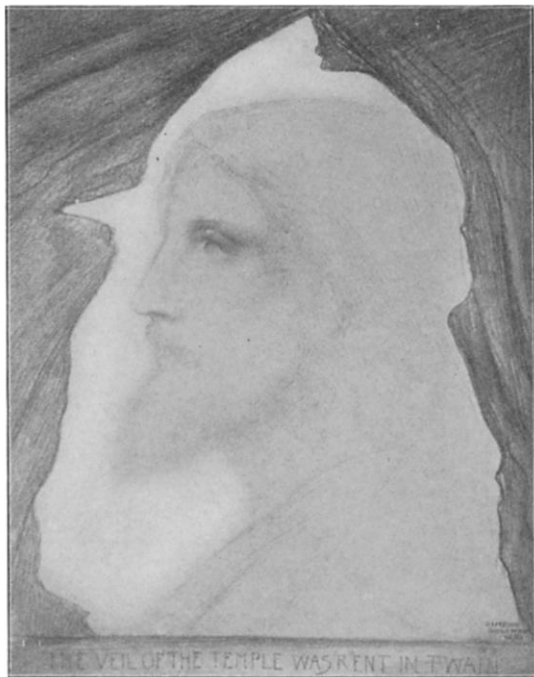
HEAD OF CHRIST

*By Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

below the picture: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Illustrating an English type is an interesting and highly finished study of the head of Christ, now in the possession of Mr. Moncure D. Conway. It is by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which he made for his picture "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee." The scene is laid in a village street at the time of a festival. Surrounded by a throng of gay companions, Mary is passing. Looking out upon her from a window in Simon's house is the face of Christ. By a sudden impulse she is moved to break away from the band of revelers. Passion-

ately she tears from her hair the flowers of frivolity, and, resolutely putting aside restraining hands, she strives to enter where Christ sits, receiving the hospitality of his host "with a gracious self-possession and exquisite simplicity of mien." No words



"THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE WAS RENT IN TWAIN"

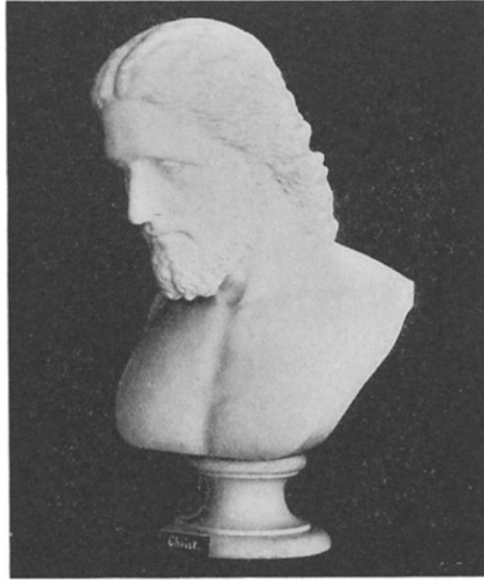
*From study by Simeon Solomon*

can more fittingly describe the *motif* of the picture than Rossetti's own, which he gives to the repentant Mary :

" Oh, loose me ! seest thou not my Bridegroom's face  
That draws me to him ? For his feet my kiss,  
My hair, my tears, he craves today : and Oh !  
What words can tell what other day and place  
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of his ?  
He needs me, calls me, loves me, let me go."

An English artist much talked about in London these days, whose sketches and drawings are making him famous, is Simeon

Solomon. A characteristic work he has entitled "The Veil of the Temple was Rent in Twain." In the significant and unique thought of the artist, no more shall the temple veil enshroud the mystery of the Divine Presence, for through its rent folds



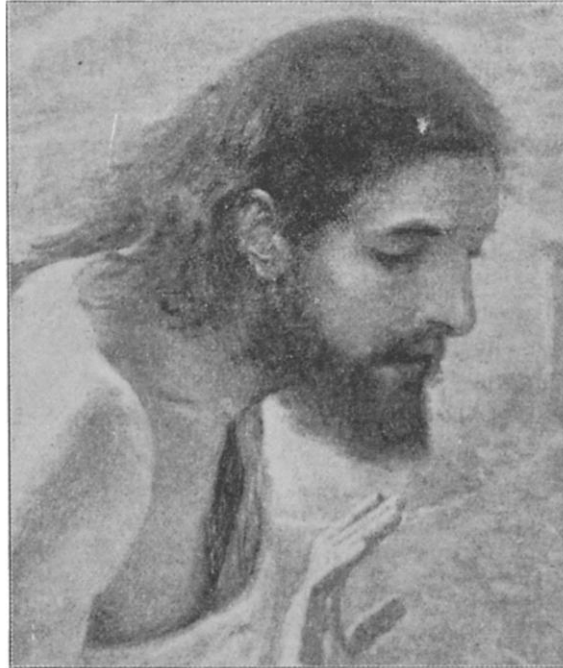
BUST

*By Thomas R. Gould*

there hath appeared the radiance of the New Shechinah, Immanuel manifest in the flesh to "shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The charm of the conception is in its beautiful simplicity and spiritual freshness, pervasive as the fragrance of a flower—none other than that face which is the "White Rose of the paradise of God." With few but telling strokes of his pencil the artist has suggested a countenance striking in effect and yet elusive like a face in a dream, leaving in a masterful way the completion of the portrait to the devout fancy of the beholder. Contemplating the picture one is reminded of what Alexander Dickson has said about the many different representations of Christ: "The fascinating theme far transcends our

highest thoughts, and although we cannot hope to do it justice, we may come modestly behind our Saviour and through the press of his perfections touch the hem of his garment."

In the Athenæum library at Boston, cherished as the work of



DETAIL OF "CHRIST APPEARING TO MARY"

*From painting by Fritz von Uhde*

one of her talented sons, is a colossal marble bust of Christ by Thomas R. Gould, who was born in 1818 and died in Florence in 1881. Jarves pronounces it "one of the finest felt and conceived idealisms in modern sculpture, Shaksperian in force of personality." By the same sculptor was an opposing conception of Satan, in which intellect is the paramount quality, as love is in his Christ.

If the celebrated pictures of modern years illustrating the life of Christ could be hung in one gallery, that depiction of him most widely admired and accepted would seem to have impressed itself upon the imagination of German genius. After a sojourn

among that religious art of the old schools which shows a wearisome repetition of harrowing *Ecce Homos*, *Pietas*, and *Crucifixions*, to meet with the intellectual and conscientious work of these artists is like coming out of the depressing gloom and chill



"GETHSEMANE"

*From painting by Kunz Meyer*

of a long-used prison into a place of pure air and bright sunshine, and thus to be reminded that our Savior's mission among men was to help and heal and comfort, as well as to suffer.

To such men as Professor Hofmann, Plockhorst, Zimmerman, Meyer, Kirchbach,<sup>11</sup> and the soldier-painter Fritz von Uhde is largely traceable the marked revival of interest in sacred art within the past decade.

<sup>11</sup> See frontispiece.

Among the works of the modern Germans one seldom sees anything that is irreverent, trivial, or carelessly treated. There is always a dignity befitting the theme. Expressing, perhaps, the national characteristics more strongly than some other representations, is Kunz Meyer's tender, impressively rendered "Gethsemane."

"O human face where the celestial gleam  
Lingers. O, still to Thee the eyes of men  
Turn with mute, questioning worship, seeing there,  
As in a mirror, the Eternal Light,  
Caught from the shining of the Central Soul,  
Whence came all worlds and whither shall return."



SKETCH OF HEAD OF CHRIST  
*Leonardo da Vinci*

Showing a departure from the traditional (bearded) likeness,  
probably under the influence of Greek art